[Music]

Clifford Evans: The name of our program, *Ladies of the Press*. My name is Clifford Evans. The name of our guest, Joe Curran, who's just completed his 25th year as president of the National Maritime Union. He also is the vice president of the AF of L-CIO.

Our ladies of the press are three newspaper women in search of a story, for *Ladies of the Press* is an actual press conference, completely ad lib, completely unrehearsed. Our ladies of the press today are Inez Robb, whose column appears in the *Chicago Daily News*, the *New York World Telegram and Sun*, and other newspapers throughout the country; Kitty Hanson of the *New York Daily News*, winner of the George Pope Memorial Award for Journalism, one of America's great reporters; and Beverly Gary, reporter and feature writer on *The New York Post*.

We'll have the first question from our ladies of the press immediately following this message.

Our guest is Joe Curran, a vice president of the AF of L-CIO, a vice chairman of the International Transport Workers Federation, which represents seamen and longshoremen in 78 countries throughout the world. He achieved prominence in 1936 as a leader of a strike in San Pedro Harbor, when the crew of which he was a member kept their ship tied up for three days, demanding more pay and better conditions. He has been fighting ever since.

He fought the International Seamen's Union and founded the NMU, the National Maritime Union, of which he has been the president since 1937. He has fought George Meaney, president of the AFL-CIO. He has defied AFL-CIO policy by visiting the Soviet Union, and while there meeting with Nikita Khrushchev. He voted to expel Jimmy Hoffa and the Teamsters Union from the AFL-CIO for reasons of corruption. Joe Curran, welcome to *Ladies of the Press*. And now a question from Inez Robb.

Inez Robb: Mr. Curran, the members of the National Maritime Union are said to have been the first to report correctly the arms and the manpower build-up in Cuba in the early autumn of 1962, and that the union so informed the government. What do the members of the union now report on conditions in Cuba? Do they agree with President Kennedy's estimate of 13,000 or 14,000 troops and no missiles, or do they agree with Senator Keating's estimate of 40,000 to 50,000 Russian troops and missiles secreted in caves?

Joe Curran: Well, Mrs. Robb, they don't agree with Senator Keating, it's 30, 40,000 Russians and missiles in caves. They do say that there are a great number of Russian military men and technicians in Cuba. Right now, the only ships we have operating into Cuba are these ships that are carrying the blackmail drugs into Cuba.

Inez Robb: Yes.

Joe Curran: So that the information we get from Cuba is pretty scarce.

Inez Robb: Mm-hmm.

Joe Curran: But as far as we know, and we do have some of our members still living in Cuba, that were Cubans, and still are Cubans, and once in a while, they write a letter to relatives, and some information is gotten that way. But they get information that there still are many thousands of technicians and military men there.

But we have reported everything that we get. We turn over any material we get to the proper authorities.

Inez Robb: Do you get any direct communications with your members in Cuba, or is that completely shut off now?

Joe Curran: Well, I'm afraid I wouldn't say –

Inez Robb: I see. yes.

Joe Curran: – anything about that, because I wouldn't want to endanger people.

Inez Robb: Recently, on a television program, James Hoffa said, quote, that life is a jungle, unquote, and that he acted accordingly. Do you believe, Mr. Curran, life is a jungle, and that people must act accordingly?

Joe Curran: Well, I believe it's a jungle. I think any human being that uses common sense will agree that it is a jungle. The dispensing of justice around this country, let us say, the manner in which the rights of the people based upon race, color, and creed are handled in this country, the way the Constitution is enforced, will tell you that to a certain extent it is a jungle.

Now what Hoffa meant when he said that he acted accordingly, that of course is what Hoffa thinks of it and how he acts. My reaction to it would be that I would have to examine every situation and act on the merits of it.

Clifford Evans: Kitty Hanson.

Kitty Hanson: Recently, you said in reference to the union's ruling with regard to rating of your union, you said that your union would defend its collective bargaining agreements. You were not concerned about what such activity would do to the labor movement. Doesn't this sound to you like something that is typical of unions today, in that they are more involved in protecting the body of the union per se, and your own little bailiwick, than they are with the total welfare of the union movement?

Joe Curran: Well, that's not an accurate quote in the first place.

Kitty Hanson: It is not an accurate quote –

Joe Curran: No.

Kitty Hanson: – in *The New York Times?*

Joe Curran: I did not say regardless of what happened to the labor movement?

Kitty Hanson: May I just read it from *The New York Times*, Tuesday, October 9th, 1962? "We are not concerned about what such activity can do to the labor movement." And a further quote in your comment to Meany, "We feel you should make this point clear so no misunderstandings could result that might bring on bloodshed."

Joe Curran: That is not an accurate quote.

Kitty Hanson: I'll have to accept that. Well, do you feel that this is maybe one of the flaws in the union movement today? That at one time they had something really to believe in and work for, and that they have got to be sort of businesses on their own, and are more concerned with their own preservation?

Joe Curran: No, I don't think that. I think the trade union movement is just as important today as it was in its beginnings, and I don't think the trade union movement and its leadership is more interested in their own personal welfare than they are in the welfare of the workers and the people generally. It just so happens that as a result of the trade union activity over the past 25 years, the people of America are enjoying quite a bit of economic happiness, and it so happens that when they do enjoy it for a considerable period of time, they take a lot of things for granted. But I can assure you, without a

militant trade union movement in this country, many of the economic luxuries they have today will disappear.

Clifford Evans: Beverly Gary?

Beverly Gary: Mr. Curran, in 1957, the AF of L-CIO Ethical Practices Committee, of which you were then and still are a member, accused Teamster president James Hoffa of, quote, "promoting the interests of notorious labor racketeers." The report went on to say that the Teamsters did not meet the standards for ethical union practices set forth in the AF of L-CIO constitution.

A short while later, at the AF of L-CIO convention, you voted with the majority to expel the Teamsters. Less than a year later, you said the Teamsters should be reinstated, quote, "whether or not Hoffa is president." What made you change your mind?

Joe Curran: Well, I found that there was no sincerity of purpose among the people who were advocating a so-called clean-up of the labor movement, the McClellans and the others who had seized upon this for political purposes. And I felt that the labor movement was being led down a blind alley. It is true that there's a certain degree of corruption in every walk of life, in the newspaper business as well. And we felt, I felt later on that a big mistake had been made, and we ought to take care of it in our own house. There are ways and means that the labor movement can take care of its own.

I wanted to point out further that the courts of the land were involved in the Hoffa situation, and they were acquitting him of charges that were being made against him. The McClellan committee wanted to hear only one side of the story. Nobody could give them anything on the other side of the story.

Beverly Gary: What led you to vote for expulsion at the convention?

Joe Curran: Because at the time, I believed there was enough basis there for action against the union, and I said then and I say now that I made a mistake. I did not weigh all the factors in the picture. I was misled by several factors. Had it been today, after what I learned were the real motives of some of those behind that, I would have voted against it. I would have spoken sharply on the floor and done everything I could to prevent expulsion.

Beverly Gary: Do you want to bring the Teamsters back into the AF of L-CIO with any suggestion of reform, or just as they are?

Joe Curran: I want them brought back into the federation as the rank and file of the Teamsters union wants them.

Clifford Evans: Inez Robb.

Inez Robb: Mr. Curran, do you feel that the labor movement is taking care of the clean-up needed in certain unions, such as the Teamsters union? Do you think they're taking care of it on their own?

Joe Curran: Oh, I do, very definitely.

Inez Robb: Do you see any –

Joe Curran: They're –

Inez Robb: – evidence of reform in Mr. Hoffa or in Hoffa's union?

Joe Curran: Well, it depends on what you classify as reform. I'd like to see a lot of reform in the newspaper business, but I don't see it. But in the – in the Teamsters union, there are a lot of people who were accused of various things who have appeared before courts of our land, and I'm sure you agree that the courts of our land are to be respected. Our jury system is to be respected. And they have been acquitted in many cases. Hoffa himself has been acquitted in many cases. Some people didn't like it. They didn't like anything about the labor movement, those same people.

And many of the others that were charged, like one, for example, that had 80 arrests charged to them, there wasn't one conviction in the whole row of arrests, but when it was made public and the papers carried it in headlines, it looked very impressive. When Bobby Kennedy laid it out on a blackboard, it looked very impressive. But there were no convictions. And it was just a job to blacken the Teamsters union and blacken the labor movement.

And I think the Teamsters union today is a good trade union. It has its share of people in it, the same as any walk of life has its people in within it, bankers, newspaper people, anybody else, that you can find have some shortcomings to them and have some difficulties. I remember a little old lady down in Norfolk, I think, when they got through checking up on her, and her taking care of the church and everything, she had I think gotten away with about $2 million from Building and Loan. Out in Iowa there was another little old lady, beautiful little old lady, that also went south with a great amount of money in her father's bank, I think that one was.

Clifford Evans: Mr. Curran –

Inez Robb: Mr. Curran, we're just –

Joe Curran: So you have these things in all walks of life. But what has happened here in the past few years, and it's the elements that want to destroy the labor movement that have made a great thing out of what was not nearly as big as it was painted. And it was to sell newspapers, too, a lot of it. Nobody's kidding me about the newspapers and what they print.

Inez Robb: Well, I don't believe that anyone for whom I have ever worked has ever had a record of 80 arrests, whether he was ever, you know, convicted and sent to jail or not. And as for the little old ladies, Mr. Curran, it's simply equality of the sexes. My sex is trying to catch up with your sex in the record of theft, you see.

Joe Curran: I agree. You're passing us. You got about 80 –

Inez Robb: Well, I think so, too, but then it's always acknowledged that women generally are better than men. But I wanted to – you've –

Joe Curran: You've got 80 percent of the world's money now, haven't you? The women?

Inez Robb: That's what I hear. I'm just trying to get my percentage now.

Joe Curran: You're outliving the men.

Inez Robb: But the – I – you questioned in the first – in your first answer to a question, you rather questioned the administration of justice in the United States. Do you question the justice that has been accorded the union movement by the courts in the past?

Joe Curran: Yes, I do. I have questioned it. I have openly questioned it in many cases. I think a union man has got two strikes on him, a union leader, when he appears before some of our courts. I definitely do that.

Clifford Evans: Kitty Hanson.

Kitty Hanson: I'm confused, Mr. Curran. In one point you say you find fault with our justice and our courts, and the next time you say the courts acquitted him, the courts couldn't find – the courts of our nation couldn't find any trouble. Seems to me that you're a little more concerned with what the people who are in are doing rather than

the actual issues. Do you believe that Mr. Hoffa is a fine, respectable, clean labor union leader, and one that you're proud to have in the labor movement?

Joe Curran: I like your interpretation of things, but we let that go. I won't argue with you on your interpretation. You're entitled to that. I think Hoffa is at the present time a respected leader of the Teamsters union.

Kitty Hanson: By whom?

Joe Curran: By the rank and file of the Teamsters union. And I think they demonstrated it very clearly in Philadelphia the other day.

Kitty Hanson: All right.

Joe Curran: And I think he's a militant trade union leader, and I think that's what bothers a lot of people. He's too militant a trade union leader. He's too close to the rank and file. They don't like that type of leader. Now he's not convicted of anything, unless you want to convict him in your paper. He hasn't been convicted in any court. And what I think of the courts is of course my own affair. I'm still an American, I think.

I'm proud to have Hoffa in the trade union movement. I think he adds the kind of strength to the labor movement that it's lacking these days, in some of its leadership.

Kitty Hanson: In other words, you think that if we had more labor leaders like Mr. Hoffa in more unions, that the union movement would overcome the fact that not enough members are hungry? You were saying that one reason that we're –

Joe Curran: I don't – I don't quite understand that question.

Kitty Hanson: I'm sorry.

Joe Curran: That's one that you coined to suit your own fancy, I imagine.

Kitty Hanson: I'm sorry. You had said that when people have been well-fed and have benefits for a certain length of time, they begin to take these things for granted.

Joe Curran: Yes, they do.

Kitty Hanson: I jumped a few sentences there. In other words, a lot of people aren't hungry enough to realize what a union can do for them. Now what I wanted to ask you is since there is some feeling that the labor union movement could be more militant, do you think more leaders like Jimmy Hoffa would help the movement?

Joe Curran: I definitely do. Yes.

Clifford Evans: On that note, we'll pause for a moment with our guest, Joe Curran. We'll be back shortly, right after this message.

Joe Curran, the difficulties, the feud, call it what you will, the disagreements between George Meany and Walter Reuther, how in your opinion can they be solved?

Joe Curran: Well, that's a difficult question to answer. First of all, there are two men that are completely different. They're completely different in background, education, and labor experience.

Clifford Evans: But if you had the opportunity –

Joe Curran: Meany comes from the old rough and tough plumber school, New York State labor school, where I got a lot of my experience. And Reuther comes from I guess what you'd call the intellectual fringe, so that there's a complete difference between them. And there is a certain degree of fear that I feel exists in George Meany that Reuther is trying to take his job away from him.

Clifford Evans: Do you think there's any basis for that fear?

Joe Curran: I don't think so. No. I think that Reuther wants very much to work with George.

Clifford Evans: Beverly Gary?

Beverly Gary: Mr. Curran, in 1961, declaring the continued loyalty of your union to the Teamsters, you said even a mouse can help a lion. Is that your image of yourself? As a mouse?

Joe Curran: Are you creating the image or are you asking me a question?

Beverly Gary: No, I'm asking you if that is your image of yourself.

Joe Curran: No, I didn't think I was a mouse. I don't think I'm a mouse now. I thought our union was small in comparison to 1,700,000 member union. Ours has less than 40,000.

Clifford Evans: Inez Robb?

Inez Robb: Mr. Curran, short of automation, is there any way in which the American merchant marine can compete with genuine foreign flagships, when the typical hourly wages for a first class shipyard mechanic is twice that in Sweden, and almost three times that in Britain, and when the monthly base pay for an able-bodied seaman exclusive of overtime is twice that of Sweden's, and more than three – well, three times that of Britain, and almost four times that of West Germany? How does one meet the competition?

Joe Curran: Well, I think, Mrs. Robb, one of the unfortunate aspects of this is that you read only half of the situation. You see, the economics of this country are also twice and three four times as much as they are in those countries. And the seamen, for example, which is the one that I am most experienced in speaking about, you'll find that in those countries, they have a raft of social legislation applying to the seamen that take care of a great many factors that are not spelled out in actual money wages.

For example, they get low rents. They have protection against eviction. They are given 80 percent of their pay at all times as long as they're available for shipping. They have low cost foods. They have low cost many other things. They have free medical attention. They have all kinds of social legislation that would bring the money figure, if you were to make it into actual money up to double what you see in actual figures on *[trails off]*.

However, I have said once, and I say again, that the American seamen are prepared to cooperate in the question of making the American merchant marine competitive. However, if you feel, if the American people feel, that the American seamen should subsidize the American merchant marine by taking wage cuts, then the American seamen asks only that all other questions be made compensatory. In other words, that the rents be cut, that the cost of the food go down, that all things be done in proportion, because he has to live here and raise a family here.

Inez Robb: No, I'm not suggesting that this be lowered. I was trying to ask you a real question about how we met this competition, because according to the figures which I have here, the United States flagships carry today only nine percent of America's waterborne commerce, whereas ten years ago, they carried thirty-six percent, instead of nine percent. This is a drastic decline. And I was asking

you, and I hoped you would answer without a chip on your shoulder, what we could do to redress this situation, which –

Joe Curran: Well, we can enforce the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, which has never been enforced, which was created to build an American merchant marine. We can also use whatever influences government has to convince the American ship or the American importer to use more American flag vessels.

We can also protect by legislation the runaway ship activity. Over some 25 million tons of shipping are under the flags of countries that have no merchant marine whatsoever. In the case of Liberia, where there's about 15 million tons, there are no seamen at all. And in Panama, with another 15 million tons or close to it, there are only 2,000 seamen. Now these vessels, and incidentally, these are the vessels that have been trading in and out of Cuba.

Clifford Evans: We have to – time just keeps running from us. We have to interrupt at this point for a message, and we'll be right back.

A question now for our guest Joe Curran from Kitty Hanson of the *New York Daily News*.

Kitty Hanson: Mr. Curran, some of our comments today have indicated that the national attitude toward unions is not maybe as enthusiastic as it used to be. I'd like to ask you, if it can be a moderately brief answer, that aside from the usual cliches about colored coverage in the newspapers and the newspapers are against unions, aside from that, what do you think that the unions could do to improve their, if you'll pardon the expression, image, so far as the rest of the nation is concerned? Some constructive steps that they might take to get their message across?

Joe Curran: Well, I don't think the image of the labor movement is too badly accepted by the American people. I think the press, radio, and television feel that the image has been affected, but I don't think so. We're winning elections every day, and organizing in the trade union movement. We need a little intellectual help here and there, because of the new type of manufacture, the new type of material that's being built in the world. We need a new perspective in some areas. But otherwise, I think the trade union movement is doing pretty well in spite of all the wars against its back.

Clifford Evans: Beverly Gary, *New York Post*.

Beverly Gary: Mr. Curran, do you think it's proper for a union labor leader to use union funds for personal reasons, be it legal fees, clothing, trips, so forth?

Joe Curran: It's a very difficult question to answer, Beverly, because the word personal has been stretched in all directions. You see, when you talk about legal fees and so forth, the Landrum-Griffin Bill covers all that. And all I can say to you is that it's not good for any labor leader to use funds contrary to law.

Clifford Evans: Inez Robb, *New York World Telegram and Sun*.

Inez Robb: Mr. Curran, the labor movement supported President Kennedy in '60. Will it support him with the same vigor in 1964?

Joe Curran: Well, I can't speak for the labor movement, Mrs. Robb, but the record that he has established thus far would indicate that the labor movement would support him, as far as I can see. That's up to this point. We don't know what he'll do in the next year. Now we have a few gripes with him, but not enough to affect our thinking about him. We think that he's done quite a good job against great obstacles.

Clifford Evans: What's your number one gripe, Mr. Curran?

Joe Curran: Well, our gripe is that we don't think he pays enough attention, and that may be because of the press of circumstances, to strengthening the merchant marine. We think the merchant marine – and we think they should have learned a lesson in World War II – we think the merchant marine, even at a cost of subsidies, should be kept strong.

Clifford Evans: We have to interrupt you at this point, Mr. Curran, because – well, the usual reason. We've run out of time and come to the close of today's session of *Ladies of the Press*, an actual press conference, completely ad lib, completely unrehearsed. Our ladies of the press today have been Inez Robb of the *New York World Telegram and Sun*, Kitty Hanson, *New York Daily News*, and Beverly Gary of the *New York Post*. This is Clifford Evans.

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